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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

REPORT

ARAB HIGH-LEVEL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AMMAN, 2-4 APRIL 2014

Summary

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and its partners, namely the League of Arab States, the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, organized the Arab High-Level Forum on Sustainable Development, held in Amman from 2 to 4 April 2014, in cooperation with the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation and the Ministry of Environment of Jordan. The Arab Forum served as a regional preparatory meeting for the second session of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, to be held in New York, in July 2014. The Arab Forum also included a session focusing on the regional preparations for the 2014 Annual Ministerial Review on the theme "Addressing on-going and emerging challenges for meeting the Millennium Development Goals in 2015 and for sustaining development gains in the future".

The Forum attracted a large high-level audience. All stakeholders were represented, including government representatives from the economic, social and environmental spheres; representatives of major groups; United Nations organizations; members of the Regional Coordination Mechanism; experts; and international and regional organizations.

The Forum provided a platform for discussing the following issues:

- Progress made in the Arab region towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals and means of accelerating their achievement and sustaining future gains. The Forum reiterated the need for a data revolution and a genuine assessment and critical analysis of the progress made in achieving the Goals, so as to uncover the real factors of success and failure. Regional lessons from the Goals needed to be taken into consideration in the formulation of the post-2015 development agenda;
- A proposed set of sustainable development goals for the Arab region, prepared by ESCWA on the basis of the outcomes of regional consultations on the subject, in addition to the key conclusions emanating from the various regional and national consultations on the post-2015 development agenda. Comments provided by participants will be taken into consideration in the revised version of the document prior to its dissemination to member States, the League of Arab States and Arab negotiators;

- The proposed Arab Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development that ESCWA and its partners are developing following a request by the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment as an update to the Sustainable Development Initiative in the Arab Region, and the Arab Regional Roadmap for Green Economy Investment, as the operational arm of the Framework. Comments provided by participants will be taken into consideration in the revised versions of both documents prior to their submission to the League of Arab States;
- Means for implementing sustainable development commitments in the Arab region. It was agreed that true global partnerships and regional mechanisms were needed to finance sustainable development and facilitate technology transfer and capacity-building;
- Future functions and organizational aspects of the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development as an important element of the regional institutional framework for sustainable development.

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Introduction

1. The 2010 High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals requested the Secretary-General to initiate the development of a post-2015 development agenda. Subsequently, in 2012, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) agreed to launch an inter-governmental process for the formulation of a single, balanced and comprehensive set of sustainable development goals, universal to all nations, to form the core of the post-2015 development agenda. Rio+20 also agreed to establish the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development to provide political leadership and guidance on sustainable development issues and act as a forum for reviewing related commitments and objectives, including the sustainable development goals. The United Nations regional commissions, including the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), were invited by the General Assembly[1] to organize regional forums on sustainable development to contribute to the work of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

2. Within this context, ESCWA and its partners conducted and participated in a series of consultations with governmental and non-governmental stakeholders throughout 2013 to help distil a regional perspective on the post-2015 development agenda and the sustainable development goals. Notable events included the following:

- Arab regional consultative meeting of civil society organizations on the post-2015 United Nations development agenda (Beirut, 14 March 2013);
- United Nations Development Group Arab Development Forum: Priorities for the Post-2015 Agenda in the Arab Region (Amman, 11 April 2013);
- Consultative session on the sustainable development goals at the Arab Regional Implementation Meeting for the Twentieth Session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development – Follow-up on Rio+20 (Dubai, 29-30 May 2013);
- Discussions on the sustainable development goals at the Expert Workshop on Updating the Sustainable Development Initiative for the Arab Region (Amman, 28 August 2013);
- Consultations on the development of a green economy investment roadmap as a tool to operationalize sustainable development programmes in the region (Amman, 29-30 August 2013);
- Arab Consultative Meeting on the Sustainable Development Goals (Gammarth, Tunisia, 18-19 November 2013);
- Post-2015 discussion at the sixth session of the Committee for Women (Kuwait City, 4-5 December 2013);
- Regional Workshop on Youth Empowerment in Post-2015 Agenda (Tunis, 13-14 December 2013).

3. Following the above-mentioned consultations, ESCWA and its partners, namely the League of Arab States, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA), organized the Arab High-Level Forum on Sustainable Development (Amman, 2-4 April 2014), in cooperation with the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation and the Ministry of Environment of Jordan. The Arab Forum served as the regional preparatory meeting for the second session of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, which will be held at the next Substantive Session of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in New York, in July 2014. The Arab Forum also included a session focusing on the regional preparations for the 2014 Annual Ministerial Review, which will also be held at the ECOSOC Substantive Session, on the theme

[1] General Assembly resolution 67/290 of 9 July 2013.

"Addressing on-going and emerging challenges for meeting the Millennium Development Goals in 2015 and for sustaining development gains in the future".

I. OBJECTIVES AND THEMES OF THE ARAB HIGH-LEVEL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

4. The Arab Forum builds on the outcomes of the consultative process that ESCWA has been leading in the Arab region, which was instrumental in pushing forward a regional sustainable development agenda. It aimed to discuss the following issues:

(a) Progress made in the Arab region towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals and means of accelerating their achievement and sustaining gains in the future;

(b) A proposed set of sustainable development goals for the Arab region,[2] prepared by ESCWA on the basis of the outcomes of regional consultations on the subject, in addition to the key conclusions emanating from various regional and national consultations on the post-2015 development agenda;

(c) The proposed Arab Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development[3] that ESCWA and its partners are developing at the request of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE) as an update of the Sustainable Development Initiative in the Arab Region; and the Arab Regional Roadmap for Green Economy Investment as the operational arm of the Framework;[4]

(d) Means of implementing sustainable development commitments in the Arab region.

II. PARTICIPANTS

5. The Forum attracted a large high-level audience. It was attended by a total of 168 participants, including representatives of the organizing partners, namely ESCWA, the League of Arab States, UNEP and the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation and the Ministry of Environment of Jordan. All seventeen ESCWA member States were represented (87 participants). It should be noted that government representation covered a multitude of ministries, namely foreign affairs, environment, social affairs and social development, planning, international cooperation, water, economy, energy, industry and trade, health, education and municipal affairs. Participation of other stakeholders, including United Nations organizations (27 participants) and major groups (25 participants), was also prominent. United Nations representation included most members of the Regional Coordination Mechanism, namely the Food and Agriculture Organization; the World Health Organization (WHO); the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS; the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; the United Nations Population Fund; the International Labour Organization, the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction; the United Nations High Commission for Refugees; the United Nations Children's Fund; and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO); in addition to the United Nations Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth and the Regional Commissions New York Office. Furthermore, experts and international and regional organizations, including the Arab Countries Water Utilities Association, the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Area, the Global Green Growth Institute attended the Forum and enriched its deliberations. The list of participants is set out in annex I to the present report.

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[2] ESCWA, *Sustainable Development Goals: An Arab Regional Perspective* (E/ESCWA/SDPD/2014/WG.1/1). Available from http://css.escwa.org.lb/SDPD/3315/5.pdf.

[3] ESCWA, *Proposal for an Arab Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development, 2015-2025* (in cooperation with the League of Arab States and the United Nations Environment Programme) (E/ESCWA/SDPD/2014/WG.1/5). Available from http://css.escwa.org.lb/SDPD/3315/2.pdf.

[4] ESCWA, *A Proposed Framework for a Green Economy Investment Roadmap for the Arab Region* (in cooperation with the League of Arab States and the United Nations Environment Programme) (E/ESCWA/SDPD/2014/WG.1/4). Available from http://css.escwa.org.lb/SDPD/3315/1.pdf.

III. DISCUSSION SUMMARY

6. The Forum was held over five substantive sessions, in addition to the opening and closing sessions. The following two side events were also organized: a meeting for major groups, organized by UN-DESA to help develop a regional civil society perspective on the sustainable development goals; and a panel discussion organized by UNIDO on inclusive and sustainable industrial development.

7. Forum discussions were informed by a number of background papers, which are available, along with other meeting documents and presentations, on the meeting website.[5]

8. The following paragraphs summarize the main points of discussion under each session and side event and the agreed follow-up actions.

A. OPENING SESSION

9. The opening session included statements from the Forum organizers and the Government of Jordan as the host of the event. A keynote address was provided by Prince Hassan bin Talal, in his present capacity as Chair of the United Nations Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation.

(a) *Statement by the United Nations Environment Programme*

- The three pillars of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental – are highly and clearly interlinked and need to be assessed and studied through an integrated holistic approach;
- The environment and the poor should be at the core of any future sustainable development agenda. The needs of the poor include employment opportunities and social and environmental security;
- The human welfare of societies requires good governance and management of scarce natural resources. The protection of social and cultural heritage is essential;
- A shift towards sustainable consumption and production patterns is urgently needed as is the transition to a green economy. Inequalities must be addressed, including inequality of access to natural resources. Governments have a core role to play in that regard.

(b) *Statement by the League of Arab States*

- The Forum constitutes an important opportunity to review progress made in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals in the Arab region and develop an Arab position on the sustainable development goals;
- The Forum is also an opportunity to discuss the Arab Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development and the Arab Green Economy Investment Roadmap, which the League of Arab States has been developing with ESCWA and other partners to guide action at the regional and national levels in the coming years;
- Participant feedback is vital to enriching both documents prior to their submission at the next special session of CAMRE and subsequently to the Arab Economic and Social Summit in 2015.

(c) *Statement by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia*

- The year 2014 is pivotal for development. Efforts at the global, regional and national levels are intensifying to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, while efforts continue to define a development agenda beyond 2015 that will guide sustainable development action at the global level over the short to medium-terms;

[5] www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNUM=3315e.

- In 2013, ESCWA organized a series of consultative meetings at the levels of governments, experts, civil society and United Nations organizations, which contributed to the elaboration of a regional vision and a homogeneous approach to the post-2015 development agenda and the sustainable development goals;
- It is critical to bring a strong regional voice to the global level. The importance of good regional preparations for the upcoming Annual Ministerial Review and the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development must not be underestimated;
- The sustainable development goals cannot address all development issues relevant to the Arab region. Work on those goals must be complemented by the development of an Arab Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development as a regional agenda.

(d) *Statement by the Government of Jordan*

- The world is currently witnessing an escalation of many crises – financial, economic, social, political and humanitarian – which are threatening the sustainability of development;
- Poverty; high illiteracy rates; population increases; high unemployment rates, especially among educated young people; slow economic growth; and increasing debts are all challenges that add to the pressures on scarce natural resources. Increasing food and energy prices have exacerbated those problems and are affecting the capabilities of many Arab countries to achieve their development goals;
- Social and political instability and armed conflict in the region have led to a growing number of refugees in some Arab countries. The refugee crisis puts great pressure on already scarce natural resources. Limited fiscal space is among the chief reasons for the decline in levels of development in the region;
- The efforts undertaken by some Arab countries to implement the principles of green economy and sustainable consumption and production are important and should be encouraged. Meetings such as the Forum provide an opportunity to exchange experiences and enhance cooperation among Arab countries.

(e) *Keynote address by Prince Hassan bin Talal*

- One of the deficiencies of the Millennium Development Goals is that they do not account for quality and equity in achievement. This is flagrant in the case of water, as guaranteed access to water is meaningless without looking at the quality of water, standards in water management and regularity of access. It is essential to embed mechanisms for equity in distribution within any new set of international commitments;
- Sustainable development is not possible without safe and equal access to water and sanitation. We must protect and improve existing water reserves, improve good governance and management of water resources and invest in new technologies to improve water quality. Sound management and informed decision-making based on accurate data and information regarding water is essential;
- There is solid evidence regarding the strategic importance of water to national development and security. Traditional fragmented approaches are neither viable nor helpful. Shared, regional conceptualizations of the water deficit problem and supranational strategies that address the common good, with emphasis on the sustainable management of shared water resources, must be at the fore of future water policy. Strategies of regional cooperation must be developed and agreed in respect to transboundary water resources;
- My vision is for the Arab world to become a thought and innovation leader on water scarcity and to pave the way for job creation, economic opportunities and growth. We therefore must investigate the solution nexus: the innovation-opportunity-sustainability nexus;

- In the Arab region, youth unemployment has reached critical levels – but this phenomenon is especially apparent among young professionals. We need to question the structural and social changes needed to facilitate the empowerment of youth and women beyond education. Without this kind of critical analysis and reflection, the post-2015 process is a missed opportunity;
- There is no Millennium Development Goal for good governance (no target or indicators) although political stability, good governance and strong and effective institutions are critical to development;
- A careful balance must be achieved between sustainable development goals that are realistic but ambitious. If the targets are not affordable and attainable, the result will be disillusionment and inaction. Nevertheless, without objectives to strive for, we risk complacency and the loss of aspirational value;
- There is no Arab roadmap annexed to the Millennium Development Goals. We have to write this roadmap ourselves while embracing the messiness of our development challenges. The interdependence between goals, as embodied for example in the water-energy-environment nexus, must be understood and must inform the roadmap to sustainable development;
- We must go beyond acknowledging the fact that we have regional problems that require regional solutions. There is a need for a dialogue on regional problem analysis and solutions, including how to manage common resources;
- Any post-2015 agenda for the region must respond to the emerging needs and challenges through an integrated approach that combines economic, social and environmental sustainability with the principles of good governance, human rights and equality.

B. Session 1: Overview of the post-2015 and the sustainable development goals processes at the global and regional levels

10. The session addressed some of the overarching challenges to sustainable development in the Arab region. Participants were briefed on the progress of the global post-2015 and sustainable development goals processes and expected next steps. Perspectives were provided on the envisioned role of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development as a mechanism for promoting an integrated and balanced approach to the three dimensions of sustainable development at the regional level and providing regional perspectives to the global agenda of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

(a) *Overall challenges to sustainable development in the Arab region*

- Resource and budget allocations for the Arab region are unknown. Development cannot proceed when available resources and the rate of their use are not identified. Transparency, notably in terms of government budget allocations, is a key issue;
- Societies need to consider what levels of individual freedoms and conformity they aspire to through a process of learning how to practice freedom, engrained within the education system. There are economic impacts related to the choices we make in relation to freedoms, including the type of capital that receives the most investments. In the region, investments have focused on developing natural capital and, to a much lesser extent, produced and intangible assets. For example, the largest shares of foreign direct investment go into real estate and mining, rather than manufacturing or services, with very low returns in terms of job creation;
- There is often a trade-off between the achievement of equity and equality and the need to reward individual productivity. Throughout the world, countries have opted for different systems to redistribute benefits. The region needs to embark on a social dialogue to make a collective public choice as to whether equal opportunities or "laissez-faire" is desired. It is equally important to know the ailments that we want to be free from as a society, and the aspirations that we want to be free to achieve.

(b) *Sustainable development and the post-2015 agenda: global context and regional aspirations*

- Several processes have resulted from Rio+20, including the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing, the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals and the Technology Mechanism. Many of these processes are converging in the development of the post-2015 agenda;
- The various regions have provided their inputs into these global processes, each according to their regional priorities. The Arab region needs to make its own contribution to reflect its needs;
- The classic North-South divide is apparent in the formulation process of the sustainable development goals, with the South favouring economic transformations, inclusive growth and social protection, and demanding commitments from the North in terms of means of implementation. As in other political processes, opting for the least common denominator is a real risk for the post-2015 agenda;
- In many instances, the achievement of sustainable development is beyond the capacities of one single country. While action at the national level is the cornerstone of development, regional integration and true global partnerships are a must, and due regard must be made to the Rio+20 principle of common but differentiated responsibility.

(c) *Perspectives on the Arab High-Level Forum on Sustainable Development*

- The League of Arab States has gone a long way in its institutional reforms in support of sustainable development, including through the work of the various councils and Arab specialized agencies and by supporting the participation of civil society organizations in its deliberations;
- In relation to the global High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, the League of Arab States sees the Arab Forum as a mechanism for promoting governance and building partnerships. At the regional level, the Forum has an important role to play in facilitating the exchange of experiences, reviewing progress in the achievement of sustainable development and the preparation of regional reports that strengthen the science-policy interface. The League of Arab States is ready to coordinate with ESCWA in the organization of future sessions of the Forum;
- The Arab Forum is an important mechanism for the region to influence the global sustainable development processes. It should play a key role in developing a vision for development in the region and catalyzing political commitment for its achievement.

(d) *Follow-up actions*

- The meeting took note of the proposed post-2015 institutional set-up under the ECOSOC. Participants recommended that ESCWA and the League of Arab States coordinate the preparation of a proposal for the regular submission of regional inputs into the High-level Political Forum through their respective regional inter-governmental governance structure (separately or jointly).

C. Session 2: Addressing on-going and emerging challenges for meeting the Millennium Development Goals in 2015 and for sustaining development gains in the future

11. The session supported regional preparations for the global 2014 Annual Ministerial Review. Progress made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals in the Arab region was summarized, highlighting lessons learned. A perspective on the future role of the League of Arab States in supporting a new post-2015 agenda was provided, stemming from the League's previous Millennium Development Goals

experience. Challenges facing Arab countries in meeting the Millennium Development Goals and sustaining gains in the future in a time of conflict and social upheaval were highlighted. Selected member State representatives reflected on their national experiences and presented key messages.

(a) *Progress made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals and lessons learned*

- Based on existing data and reports, the Arab region, on average, has had mixed progress. While the number of poor persons dropped from 5 to 4 million over 15 years, progress is mainly limited to cases of extreme poverty – a review of other levels of poverty shows that there was an increase, notably after 2010. Considerable improvement in education was achieved, notably in terms of gender equality in education, although this has not translated into improvement of women's participation in the workforce. Progress in child mortality and maternal health was also registered. Outside of these areas, most least developed countries in the region have not made much progress. Progress in Palestine was greatly hampered because of the Israeli occupation;
- Millions more in the Arab region now have access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation, even though the rural-urban divide has deepened. The destruction of infrastructure due to conflict has prevented sufficient progress towards the targets of the seventh Millennium Development Goal in some parts of the region;
- There is a need for a genuine assessment and critical analysis of progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals that uncovers the real factors of success and failure. Countries, Governments and other development stakeholders must be encouraged to undertake this critical assessment of progress given that substantive change cannot be achieved by accelerating business as usual, but mostly by changing the rules of the game and selecting the factors and dynamics that have greater impact, rather than concentrating on one target;
- Despite important constraints on fiscal space, national efforts for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals should be maintained and critical policy interventions must be prioritized to accelerate achievement. For sustainability, progress should be institutionalized and mainstreamed in national or local development plans;
- While the Millennium Development Goals were not framed to encompass the entire development agenda at the national and global levels, they have succeeded in placing key sustainability objectives at the forefront of decision-making in the Arab region. Factors discussed by the participants that constrain the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals include political, governance and cultural factors. Sustainable development can never be achieved without the prevalence of peace and stability. Good governance and respect for human rights are indispensable for an inclusive development agenda, and bad governance represents a major threat to development;
- It is of the utmost importance for future sustainable development goals to be rooted in a solid narrative that provides an encompassing conceptual framework, including issues of governance, peace, security and culture.

(b) *Poverty and hunger*

- Extreme poverty, hunger and undernourishment remain a major challenge in the Arab region, especially in its least developed countries. However, the challenge is not confined to those countries. Gains in reducing poverty were reversed due to political instability and conflicts in a number of middle income countries, and many countries in the region remain vulnerable to food shortages. There is a need to reinforce a positive nexus between natural resource management, poverty and hunger. For example, enhancing water use efficiency and preventing land degradation to improve agricultural production is expected to help address food security challenges in the region;

- Special attention needs to be awarded to the situation of refugees and internally displaced persons so as to secure their basic right to food, but also to the receiving host communities whose economic situation has been severely affected. The global community needs to assume its responsibilities in supporting host countries.

(c) *Adopting progressive social policies and social protection systems*

- The Millennium Development Goal approach in several Arab countries has suffered from a focus on quick fixes and narrow-scale interventions, and has to a large extent neglected the issue of inequality. A comprehensive, coherent and coordinated approach to development is needed, including the adoption of progressive social policies and protection systems;
- A universal social protection floor that includes all social groups, persons with disabilities and geographical regions is needed as a step towards achieving equal opportunity for all and promoting social justice and good governance. It is also an important mechanism for sustaining development gains in the future. A minimum social protection floor is affordable in most Arab countries given that the cost is often lower than the current cost of subsidies.

(d) *Driving inclusive development and promoting growth with equity*

- While the Arab region has performed relatively well in terms of aggregate economic growth compared to other developing regions, growth has however been mostly confined to the oil sector and to an expanding service sector in low-value added activities. In addition, the majority of citizens have not reaped the benefits of economic growth and distribution of wealth was not inclusive, leading to sub-national inequalities;
- There must be a focus on inclusive growth through a more diversified economic structure and macroeconomic policies must be rethought to achieve this objective. Creation of productive employment is central in this new vision of inclusive growth;
- Any future monitoring framework for economic development should capture sub-national inequalities and target the poorest segments of the population;
- Participation of all segments of society, including persons with disabilities, in development and policy-setting must be institutionalized within a human rights framework.

(e) *Emphasizing gender equality and women's empowerment*

- Despite progress in terms of gender parity in education, the region faces major challenges in terms of gender equality and women's empowerment. The labour force participation rate is the lowest in the world and female representation in parliaments is lagging behind the rest of the world;
- The post-2015 agenda must put forward concrete goals and targets to achieve real gender equality and women participation at all levels of policy-making. Policy responses by countries must reflect the important spill over effects of gender equality and empowerment on all development objectives, including education, child mortality and economic growth.

(f) *Enhancing the quality of services*

- The Millennium Development Goals focus mainly on the quantitative dimension of development rather than the qualitative dimension and many Arab countries performed well according to the majority of these indicators. For example, improvements in the enrolment rates in many countries in the region was not accompanied by equal improvements in the quality of education. Similarly, access to water, as measured by the Millennium Development Goal indicators improved in a number of Arab countries. However, those indicators did not take into account the quality of water resources or the intermittency of the service.

(g) *New regional partnerships for financing development*

- The global and regional environment for partnership has changed drastically in recent years. The share of the traditional donor countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee is decreasing, and new developmental partnerships are emerging. It is therefore important to forge a new regional partnership for development that brings together a range of different actors including Governments, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and international and regional organizations.

(h) *Measuring progress*

- A true data revolution is needed to facilitate monitoring and evaluation and ensure greater accountability at different levels. There was consensus on the need to double the efforts of the Arab region in strengthening and improving data generation, analysis and dissemination. Innovative tools are needed to measure progress against the goals based on lessons learned from the Millennium Development Goals. Success stories from the region include tailoring Millennium Development Goals at the national and sub-national levels by adapting them to the city level and proposing city targets and indicators, for example;
- More efforts should be exerted to reconcile international and national sources of statistics and information. The use of credible national data should be encouraged in assessing progress and preparing national and regional reports, and in the production of practical tools for monitoring at the national and sub-national levels;
- Particular efforts are needed to devise a mechanism to measure progress in the achievement of the eighth Millennium Development Goal, and Arab countries should consider issuing a regional report on gaps in its achievement.

(i) *From global to local*

- In the global-to-local continuum, there is a need to further clarify the accountability framework that underpinned Millennium Development Goal implementation as it might impact post-2015 negotiations and agreements. Meeting participants noted that issues of global trade and global financing, among others, undoubtedly affected progress in attaining the Goals. Going forward, we need to ensure that the sustainability narrative or future goals explicitly consider the following four levels: global, regional, national and local.

(j) *Follow-up actions*

- The meeting recommended that the outputs of the Arab Forum be submitted to the League of Arab States, to the next Ministerial Session of ESCWA (June 2014) and to the 2014 Annual Ministerial Review (July 2014). The Government of Jordan, as host of the event, will participate in the ECOSOC Substantive Session and transmit key messages to the Annual Ministerial Review.

D. SESSION 3: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS THAT SUPPORT ARAB REGIONAL PRIORITIES

12. The session addressed the issue of young people as a catalyst for sustainable development in the Arab region. The session presented a proposal for a set of sustainable development goals that meet the needs of the Arab region, on the basis of the document "Sustainable Development Goals: An Arab Regional Perspective", prepared by ESCWA. The proposal focused on the regional context; the key principles, priorities and transformational changes needed to achieve sustainable development; provided a critical review of goals proposed by the global community in terms of suitability for the Arab region; and developed

a set of goals and targets that Arab negotiators must promote in the coming period. Two member State representatives (Tunisia and Egypt) participating in the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals presented their views based on global progress achieved thus far.

(a) *Young Arabs as a catalyst for sustainable development in the region*

- The Arab region is facing two important transformations: democratic and demographic. Nevertheless, it has yet to reap the benefits of both transformations. Young people have not benefited from the political changes that occurred in several Arab countries and their political participation has not improved because institutional frameworks have not changed. Furthermore, youth unemployment rates in the region are very high, especially among young women, leading to high migration;
- Youth issues should be clearly mainstreamed into future sustainable development goals. The following five themes have surfaced as priorities for young people in the region from crowd-sourcing exercises: education; employment and entrepreneurship; health; peace and security; and participation and governance;
- Efforts must be exerted to halt violent behaviour and addiction to drugs among young people in the region. More research on the reasons behind such phenomena and ways of addressing them is needed.

(b) *An Arab proposal on sustainable development goals*

- The Arab region needs goals that address its challenges and development priorities. The sustainable development goal formulation process is political and its outcomes might or might not coincide with regional priorities. There is therefore a need to give momentum to Arab negotiators to push forward a regional agenda. The paper on sustainable development goals developed by ESCWA attempted to capture the outcomes of regional processes and consultations by proposing a small set of goals that are not necessarily comprehensive, but focus on major regional priorities. The conceptual framework puts human rights and well-being at the core, linking them to sustainable resource use, global commons, governance issues and global partnerships;
- Shortcomings in the Millennium Development Goals are widely acknowledged and should be addressed in the sustainable development goals. Additional challenges include the need to address a broader range of issues that are priorities for the region, while acknowledging that each country will have its own set of priorities and constraints;
- A number of issues were deemed critically important for the region, including peace and security (with a specific target for ending the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land); good governance; reducing poverty and inequality; and securing water, energy and food. Although the draft version of the ESCWA paper included these issues, a number of participants were of the view that the revised version of the paper should have them as stand-alone goals. In addition, participants recognized and supported the full integration of environment across all goals and targets as well as the mainstreaming of gender and youth;
- It is important to look beyond income poverty at other poverty dimensions, such as access to quality health and education services, unemployment and inequality. There are no global guidelines for addressing inequality, with Governments opting for specific national policy decisions. There is also a need to reconsider the money-metric poverty line of United States dollars ($) 1.25. At this level, poverty in the Arab region amounts to 4 per cent, but if the level is raised to $3, poverty rates increase significantly;
- There is a need for an integrated framework for sustainable development goals that embeds the environment across all goals, rather than in one separate goal. UNEP experts have identified criteria and a methodology for developing interlinked environmental targets;

- The controversy at the global level around the inclusion of goals on peace and security, governance and sustainable consumption and production was recognized. The goal on global partnerships and means of implementation represents a particular challenge, given that it necessitates changes to the rules of partnerships and tackling structural obstacles. Some participants stressed the need to frame goals differently by focusing on enablers, including adequate and transparent public resources, improved productive capacities and social protection;
- Participants found that the ESCWA paper provided a valid narrative and a good proposal for goals that could be built upon. Some issues were found to be missing from the proposal, such as ecosystem services, production capacities, economic growth and diversification, disaster risk reduction, debt relief and sustainable transportation;
- Some participants suggested that more focus should be placed on health issues, including HIV/AIDS, health problems related to pollution and non-communicable diseases. Some participants also pointed out that, unless indicators are provided, some of the targets, such as quality education and effective institutions, remained open to interpretation;
- Participants stressed that the post-2015 development agenda should not be transformed into a mechanism for exerting political pressure on developing countries or imposing conditionality on support;
- It was pointed out that some priorities are region specific and may not necessarily be adopted globally. They would be included in the Arab Strategic Framework on Sustainable Development which is currently under development by ESCWA, the League of Arab States and UNEP.

(c) *Follow-up actions*

- Participants provided important comments and suggestions for the ESCWA paper on sustainable development goals. They were invited to provide written suggestions before 20 April 2014 to be taken into consideration by ESCWA in the preparation of a revised version of the document, prior to its dissemination to Arab negotiators. The revised paper will also be submitted to CAMRE and the Council of Arab Social Affairs Ministers at their next session in preparation for its submission to the upcoming Arab Economic and Social Development Summit in early 2015.

E. Session 4: Proposal for an Arab Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development

13. The session presented the Proposal for an Arab Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development, 2015-2025, prepared by ESCWA in cooperation with UNEP and the League of Arab States (Department of Environment, Housing, Water Resources and Sustainable Development) at the request of CAMRE. The Framework is an update of the Sustainable Development Initiative in the Arab Region and reflects ongoing and emerging challenges and opportunities for the Arab region. The session also discussed the Proposed Framework for a Green Economy Investment Roadmap for the Arab Region, which is considered as one of the operational arms of the Strategic Framework. Experiences from Arab countries and other regions in linking green economy to national sustainable development agendas were also presented.

(a) *Sustainable Development Initiative in the Arab Region: lessons learned*

- The Sustainable Development Initiative in the Arab Region was launched in 2002 at the World Summit on Sustainable Development as a type II initiative and has been implemented in the Arab region over the past 12 years. Several lessons can be learned from this experience, which are documented in the various progress reports prepared by the League of Arab States. While many of the priorities originally included in the Initiative are still relevant today, CAMRE requested that it be updated to take into account emerging challenges and be developed into a new Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development. The Arab experience in developing regional sustainable development indicators is instrumental in that exercise.

(b) *Proposed Arab Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development*

- The preparation of the proposed Arab Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development followed a consultative process with various stakeholders. The main improvements compared to the Sustainable Development Initiative include the addition of emerging priorities such as water, energy and food security; climate change; and green economy. A section on means of implementation was included that highlighted the need to enhance cooperation in the region and find mechanisms for funding relevant programs;
- The Arab Strategic Framework stresses the need to build on existing Arab strategies and action plans (such as those on sustainable consumption and production, water, energy and education) and on existing commitments to global agreements, such as the multilateral environmental agreements, so as to avoid duplication of efforts;
- Green economy represents one of several possible operational arms for the Arab Strategic Framework, and global and regional environments currently provide fertile grounds for green economy. The Framework for a Green Economy Investment Roadmap for the Arab Region, as proposed by ESCWA, is a step in that direction and responds to a CAMRE request to identify the best green economy policies and priorities for the region; the size of the requested investment; and the green financing mechanisms available. The Green Economy Investment Roadmap aims to address gaps in vision, information, resources and enabling environments, and includes a number of components, including a stock-taking report, a green economy policy toolbox, a financing strategy and a capacity-building programme;
- Numerous success stories in green economy exist in various regions of the world and in different sectors that can inspire action in the Arab region. The African Union programme on green economy is a notable example. A major challenge to advance green economy is the development of adequate policies that favour the reallocation of capital in the right direction. The region should benefit from the potential for green technology leap-frogging to improve the environmental performance of its growing industrial base;
- The institutional set-up in support of sustainable development and green economy is very important. In Jordan, for example, the Supreme National Committee on Sustainable Development is co-chaired by the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation and the Ministry of Environment. This has provided a good potential for cross-government initiatives, such as the green economy scoping study which was completed in 2010;
- Participants found the Arab Strategic Framework to be comprehensive overall. They stressed the need for a convergence of priorities between the Arab proposed sustainable development goals and the Framework. Some participants suggested the addition of issues such as dealing with globalization, tackling HIV/AIDS in line with the Arab AIDS Strategy, geological risk management and access to disaster risk information. A green economy approach to sustainable development must take into account the specificities of each country. More studies were therefore needed at the national level.

(c) *Follow-up actions*

- Participants provided important comments on the Strategic Framework and the Green Economy Investment Roadmap. They were invited to provide written suggestions before 20 April 2014 for consideration by ESCWA in the preparation of a revised version of both documents, to be submitted to the next CAMRE session in preparation for their submission to the next Arab Economic and Social Development Summit in early 2015.

F. Session 5: Means of implementation

14. The session considered the means needed to support the implementation of the new sustainable development agenda in the Arab region. In particular, research and development and technology gaps were discussed, notably in critical sectors like water, energy and food, in addition to domestic and regional resources that could be mobilized to bridge the persistent knowledge gap.

(a) *Technology, research and development*

- There are multiple gaps that need to be bridged in the region, namely digital, technology and knowledge gaps. These gaps exist between countries, within the same country and between generations and could have multiple causes. Numerous tools are available for harnessing technology for development and supporting a knowledge society. The proposed sustainable development goals need a stronger focus on technology, including critical sectoral technologies for the region (e.g. water technologies), and means of exploiting existing traditional knowledge;
- The costs involved in the acquisition of technology in the Arab region are high relative to the outcomes achieved from its use. Technology transfer cannot take place without a supporting scientific research environment and adequate levels of investment. Politicians look for quick returns and therefore do not favour investments in long-term research projects. The private sector is willing to invest in technology transfer if an enabling environment is provided. True global partnerships and regional mechanisms are needed to operationalize technology transfer;
- Research and development in the agricultural sector is of particular importance for the Arab region, given that it is a net importer of food and the largest grain importer worldwide. Research and development can play a positive role in bridging the yield gap by allowing more food production with fewer resources. The challenge of modernizing the agricultural sector requires the use of different technology transfer approaches that benefit rural communities, such as farmer field schools and innovation platforms.

(b) *Water-energy-food nexus*

- Access to drinking water and sanitation is a human right. There are short-term and longer-term solutions to the Arab water crisis, including wastewater treatment and reuse and tackling physical leaks in the distribution network, which sometimes result in the loss of up to 80 per cent of water. Longer term solutions are more difficult, with limited options for increased capacity. The key solution is technology for smarter water use;
- Achieving a positive water-energy-food nexus in the region is possible but requires policy coherence between the three sectors. Technology also plays a key role in ensuring smarter water use, especially technological advancements in desalination and agriculture;
- There should be a consistent approach to the issue of water in the sustainable development goals in the Arab region that should meet the objectives of the Arab Water Strategy, taking into account the lessons learned from the Millennium Development Goals.

(c) *Follow-up actions*

- Participants agreed that true global partnerships and regional mechanisms were needed to finance sustainable development and facilitate technology transfer. In particular, there was a call to decouple regional and international development financing (Arab Development Banks and international donors) from political positions in the light of tensions in the region. These issues must be reflected in the Arab Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development.

IV. MAJOR GROUPS SIDE EVENT

15. A background on current global-level post-2015 processes was provided along with the major groups' positions and reactions to the 19 focus areas developed by the Open Working Group. Participants were informed about the Sustainable Development Goals e-Inventory and the upcoming SD2015 advocacy toolkit prepared by the Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future, and examples from the e-Inventory analysis were provided as discussion tools. Participants gathered in small groups to discuss the Open Working Group's focus areas and develop regional priorities, divergences from the major groups' positions and proposals for regional goals and targets. Major group representatives made interventions during the plenary sessions of the Arab Forum that focused on the following:

(a) Gender equality and women empowerment: there was a call for the full implementation of the fundamental rights of women and girls, including access to justice, the elimination of violence against women and girls, a ban on forced underage marriage, access to economic and natural resources and participation in formal employment. Equality between men and women in political, social and economic life and decision-making was emphasized from a social justice perspective;

(b) Youth and children: there was a call for access to quality education; the provision of decent employment for all, including young women; and the promotion of an enabling environment for innovation. Participation of young people in decision-making and their access to information were also highlighted;

(c) Food and agriculture: the food sovereignty principle was emphasized as was the need to help local farmers and producers, not only by developing their productivity but also by increasing the added value of their produce, and giving priority to investments that satisfied local food and nutrition security. There was a call for the development of a common regional strategy to ensure food security, build strategic food reserves to protect against any crises and adopt a unified mechanism for trade. Responsible investments in agriculture that adopted a human rights approach and protected and preserved traditional knowledge needed to be encouraged. Enhancing food security and the right to food in areas suffering from protracted crises should be a top priority.

V. UNITED NATIONS INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION SIDE EVENT ON INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

16. The side event focused on industrialization as a driver of development in the Arab region. The following UNIDO vision for promoting industrialization that is inclusive and sustainable was presented:

(a) Long term development can only be achieved through strong, inclusive and resilient industrial and economic growth that integrates the social and environmental dimensions. The Secretary-General's High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda calls for a transformation of economies for jobs and inclusive growth and specifies industrialization as an important strategy to achieve this;

(b) The overlap between public and private interests in sustainable development is becoming increasingly clear, and the development and implementation of the post-2015 agenda will require an unprecedented level of partnership between businesses, Governments, civil society and other key stakeholders;

(c) Means for engaging and partnering with the private sector need to consider how businesses can best contribute to global sustainability.

VI. CONCLUDING SESSION

17. The concluding session revisited the functions and organizational aspects of the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development in light of the overall discussions. Closing remarks by Forum partners followed.

Agenda, functions and organizational aspects of the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development

- It was stressed that sustainable development cannot be reduced to the environment. Environmental integration should not be carried out in a mechanical way. Instead, an integrated approach to development should be promoted through the Arab Forum. Governmental representation at the Forum should be decided by Governments according to national circumstances. However, it was important to ensure large and balanced participation of representatives from governmental institutions related to the political, financial, economic, social and environmental sectors. Participation of major groups was to be maintained;
- The agenda of the Arab Forum should be flexible and action-oriented to allow it to address emerging issues. Preparations for the Forum at the national level need to be institutionalized and could provide input to the agenda of the Arab Forum. Regional reports on sustainable development could be prepared based on national reports;
- The Arab Forum is seen as an intergovernmental regional platform for promoting an integrated and balanced approach to the three dimensions of sustainable development at the regional level. The Forum should review progress, generate political impetus and launch regional partnerships and actions to advance sustainable development. It should be a catalyst for a strengthened global partnership for sustainable development, providing political leadership grounded in solid science;
- The Forum should be a space where best practices are discussed and solutions are found. It should provide political leadership and recommendations for sustainable development in the Arab region and should follow-up and review progress in implementing Arab sustainable development strategies, frameworks and commitments. Globally, the forum should serve to prepare for meetings and deliberations of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and provide regional perspective to its agenda;
- To match the four year cycle of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, it was proposed that the Arab Forum would be held at the level of Heads of States as part of the Arab Economic and Social Development Summit when the Forum was held at the General Assembly level. That was expected to have positive spill-over effects on the functions of the League of Arab States, by promoting an integrated approach. In other years, the Arab Forum would be held by ESCWA at the ministerial and expert levels.

VII. EVALUATION OF THE MEETING

18. An evaluation questionnaire was distributed to assess the relevance, effectiveness and impact of the Forum. A total of 62 participants responded to the questionnaire. The majority of the respondents rated the overall quality of the meeting as high. Most respondents thought the Forum papers prepared by ESCWA as well as the presentations to be of good quality. Respondents commended the clarity of the meeting objectives while many thought that it met its objectives and provided a good opportunity for networking and experience sharing among experts. When asked about the need for follow-up regarding the results of the meeting, most of the respondents were positive. In view of the importance of the topic, participants requested to maintain momentum by finalizing the regional sustainable development goals proposal and the Arab Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development, taking into consideration the comments of member States. Proposals to address national and regional mechanisms of implementation and follow-up were also raised.

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